



Indiana State Department of Agriculture
Governor Michael R. Pence
Lt. Governor Sue Ellspermann, Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development
Gina Sheets, Indiana Agriculture Director

ISDA Resource Specialist Sarah Lake works in the field on behalf of farmers and the environment.

By Robert Ziegler, ISDA Director of Communications

How familiar are you with terms and items like block chute, grade stabilization structure, native grass plantings, grassed waterways and canopy inlet pipes?

For Sarah Lake, Resource Specialist for Indiana State Department of Agriculture's Division of Soil Conservation, these things are just a part of her everyday work in assisting the Indiana farmer and other landowners with making sound conservation practices work toward his bottom line as a business owner.

Lake works for ISDA out of Kokomo and the surrounding four-county area, and is also a leader for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program administered by the state. She grew up in the Fort Wayne area but an interest in environmental science took her to Purdue. After being graduated, she worked for a couple of county governments before beginning at the ISDA Division of Soil Conservation.

"Growing up I didn't know there were jobs like this," she said. "I love being outside and working in the environment. It's also nice to help the farm community and hopefully make a difference."

Spending part of a recent day showing us a little about her job, Lake first takes us to a block chute, a grade stabilization structure she designed to help prevent erosion into a stream on a Tipton County farm. Because of the relatively steep grade of the stream bank, water running through the field rushes down and takes soil sediment and nutrients with it. The block chute is composed in part with cinder blocks and designed to hold the soil in place as the water runs over the edge of the bank so the soil runoff is kept to a minimum. Lake designs a number of these and other devices to reduce erosion, as do other members of the ISDA soils team across the state.

This is just one of the many types of projects that Lake is involved with. Even on this same property, a couple of hundred yards away from the stream bank, is a new waterway also designed by Lake. The idea here is again to reduce soil erosion and keep nutrients in the ground, rather than allowing them to reach the water.

"If a farmer has a gulley in the field, he can seek assistance from us," she explained. "We will look at how much water is coming into the area and then at the grade, and we'll design a waterway. One thing we can do, as we did here, is widen the bottom. That reduces the velocity of water going through that area."

ISDA Director Gina Sheets said having the resource specialists positioned around the state also provides a two-way conduit of information for the department in its mission to come alongside Indiana's agricultural producers.



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“Because the soils team is out in the fields working with the farmers, ISDA gains firsthand knowledge of the challenges facing our farmers,” Sheets said. “ISDA can then be even more proactive and timely in our assistance, being of service around the state of Indiana.”

Lake said she experiences a positive response from landowners to the offers of assistance ISDA offers to producers.

“We get a good response from producers,” she said. “There can be some additional paperwork involved but the benefits to their field, the sustainability of their farm and the cost-share opportunities all make it worth it to them.”

Much of the work is part of an extended partnership involving, ISDA, Soil & Water Conservation Districts and various federal agencies such as USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency.

ISDA Soil Conservation Division employee Jordan Seger said ISDA resource specialists like Lake (there are 26 of them across the state) truly are there to help Hoosier landowners both in conservation efforts and in supporting their economic bottom line.

“ISDA Resource Specialists work directly with private landowners, county Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service to voluntarily and proactively address and overcome soil and water resource issues like erosion in crop fields,” Seger said. “By utilizing land survey techniques and applying proven designs, specialists custom tailor erosion control and agronomic solutions to resolve resource issues on agricultural land across the state allowing for efficient farm production while being good stewards of the land. “

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(Photo: ISDA Resource Specialist Sarah Lake points out a block chute grade stabilization structure that she designed, under construction on a Tipton County farm)